

Movement and perception.

The representation of the urban landscape as project driver

“The “man of the crowd”, who only has a name for the record, is first and foremost a glance, a distance by which the character of a place is identified and grasped, brought before the naked truth that the instant reveals.

The city exists en masse and disperses as grains, as *gramen*, but it is the luminous palpitation of the beings that move through it, the journey itself, that lifts these grains, that mixes and swirls them. The rule is simple: the more divergent and capricious the movement, the less it is subjected to the restrictive canons that look to limit it, and the greater the chance that the city will be identified, revealed, raised.”

Jean-Christophe Bailly, *La grammaire générative des jambes*¹

This conference questions the multiple means of transcribing the visual perception of urban space in drawings, diagrams, maps, figures, signs, or more generally in “percepts” (Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, 1991²), but also in photography, in multimedia works, or in texts that contribute in sparking the first impulse of a project. The initial hypothesis is that representation, as a first level of interpretation, is a critical means of communication of the spatial experience around and within architecture, understood here as a “moving” presence, namely, an observed transformation.

This presence allows itself to be apprehended from different perspectives: as an object to observe, determined by a system of signs, forms, geometrical relationships, proportions, colours, that interact with anthropized and/or natural contexts; as a generator of perceptive experiences of space and landscape, moving in scale from the interior spaces of architecture in its purest sense, to the more vast and complex spaces of the city and the territory; as a generator of movements, around and within, that lead to new viewpoints and thus to new perceptions of the object and its ever-changing interactions with its surroundings.

We intend to examine the potential that the representation of the *perceived* offers, both as a means of critically reading a context, and, above all, as a means of operating – in project terms – in the city, at the urban scale, the building scale and the more intimate interior scale. The contemporary city, with its extreme diversity of landscapes that generate a broad range of visual perceptions – from bustling teeming centres to abandoned lifeless spaces, and all that is in-between – provides the most promising context. Two types of language (that can be combined) and their reconstructive potential, will be considered: the written and/or spoken word as a critical and interpretative instrument of reality; and the image, in its double sense as both iconographical atlas in which place manifests itself, and as representation of spatial perception, even as a figurative alternative of reality (thus already a project of sorts).

¹ BAILLY, Jean-Christophe, *La phrase urbaine*, Seuil, Paris 2013, p. 23.

² DELEUZE, Gilles, GUATTARI, Félix, *Qu'est-ce la philosophie ?*, Les Editions de Minuit, Paris 1991 (English language edition translated by TOMLINSON, Hugh and BURCHELL, Graham, *What is philosophy?* published in 1994 by the Columbia University Press).

Two forms of movement

Movement, or motion, is understood here in the Aristotelian sense of “change” and “becoming” that things are subject to, depending upon the different climatic and light conditions under which they appear, of the diversity of uses that disrupt their physiognomy, of the multiplication of layers, filters and presences that build up between the perceiving subject and the object in question. A *becoming* that can be seen as negative, if it implies marks of the passing of time or the absence of vital life that animates and regenerates spaces. Often these marks manifest themselves in the form of degradation, wear, abandon, disaffection, and transform places into unappealing non-places.

On the contrary, change can be perceived as positive when immobility makes way for the resumption of movement that transforms these “non-places” into attractive and inviting centralities. Visual perception, for its part, leads to a second (internal) movement as the subject is gripped by a sensation of repulsion or attraction, that develops at a sensory and emotional level before the visible forms are processed by the intellect into “meaningful forms”. The sensory qualities of perceived landscapes invoke the interiority of the observer by generating multiple representations, internal visions, in which the elements of the real landscape organise and hierarchise themselves, gain a subjective mass, and are redistributed into new physical and perceptual units that prefigure a transformation. This initial “emotive” approach, operating “*en deçà des signes*”, (referring to a level before, below, or separate from symbolic meaning) often takes on the role of project catalyst (M. Steinmann, 2020³) for its potential to produce suggestive images that influence the intellectual comprehension of forms and their translation into signs. In this perspective, the visual perception of the context is inspiring for the designer and translated into sketches and notes it can become the driver of future form and new relationships with the existing. Similarly, for the interpreter (historian or critic), a genetic analysis carried out from these initial transcriptions of a sensory and emotive pre-appreciation, the site of memories, source ideas, and the lived and intimate experience of the creator, can lead to original interpretative perspectives.

Three types of landscapes

By “landscape” we mean the visual representation of an urban or anthropized reality, via a conceptual and theoretical interpretative grid, that comes before the urban project and before the construction of a critical and interpretative discourse.

In this context, making landscape means reorganising its components into a mental image, or several mental images, possibly into a sequence of images, and transcribing them, graphically or verbally, in order to examine and interpret them. Developing this landscape would lead to producing alternative and synthetic representations of reality, on the basis of one’s own personal perception, that interpret the essence and the structure in order to clarify which elements might be useful in the rehabilitation of degraded urban spaces, or those undergoing transformation or awaiting a new identity. What we intend to observe is precisely this moment of transformation from a perceptible landscape (the result of an operation of abstraction carried out within and by visual perception), to the representation of a “rational and objective landscape”, as defined in the plans of a finished project or fixed in a critical discourse.

More precisely, we wish to investigate the notion of landscape via three categories, or three interpretative categories:

- **Urban landscapes** considered as an entity of hubs, voids and flows that condense around, and incorporate, architecture. We are referring to a heterogeneous family of sites, of varying breadth,

³STEINMANN, Martin, « Stimmung », n. 16, 2020, pp. 59-73.

incorporating natural and artificial elements, physical and/or visual degradation, signs of renaissance, established centralities, from which transitional zones emerge. Contemporary cities often adopt the form of a hyper-city, a neologism that associates the ideas of city and hypertext (André Corboz, 2009⁴) drawing attention to the absence of hierarchical order in favour of an apparently random accumulation of undifferentiated spaces. It is thus the role of visual perception to reorganise the information and the different elements, weaving new hierarchical relationships, re-establishing centralities, background, and foreground. Perceived and interpreted in this way, urban form moves from the status of *patchwork*, in which all parts are positioned at the same level, mixing together like in a digital morphing, to a complex system, redrawn and recreated.

- **Interior landscapes.** Architecture is the site of a dichotomy, between an interior space that provides a function, and an envelope situated at the interface with the context. Accessing the interior presupposes crossing thresholds, passing through transitional spaces, horizontal and vertical circulation spaces, following a route along which the moving body undergoes a sensory experience stimulating the “feeling of spatiality” (L. Moretti, 1952-1953⁵). This experience is influenced by the “objects” that occupy the space – both fixed and mobile furniture, the views to the exterior, the devices that distract, canalise or concentrate the attention towards the interior or exterior views – and that generate a feeling of distance or of proximity, according to the position and size of the openings, the presence or absence of clear spatial limits (aspects that are in turn reinforced or diminished by different light qualities). To what extent do these initial spatial sensations guide the critical discourse of the lived interior? How are they fixed, communicated? In what form? And what is their potential to renew or to improve a space that is felt to be unappealing? For the designer working on interior spaces, to what extent does this initial visual (though also olfactive, tactile and auditive) impact, and its graphic and verbal transcription, guide future decisions?
- **Landscape landscapes.** By this, we mean situations conceived of as “landscape” within the context of a project, or that have evolved over time to become impregnated with more or less homogeneous environmental, cultural and geographical connotations. These landscapes, conceived by specialists, seem today to take on the role of urban systems that, integrating natural or under-anthropized spaces, or voids perceived as “absences” that take on the role of physical and perceptive pauses, constitute the heterogeneous built tissue of the contemporary city. Today, the landscape dimension, and its visual perception, is ever more entwined with satellite imagery, such as Google Maps, allowing a view of the territory that is both synthetic and expansive. Reading “empty figures” via satellite imagery has become a normal perceptive experience of the urban landscape, integrated in large scale projects.

International conference

The conference is aimed at architects, urban planners, landscape architects, and designers involved in the conception of urban space from the scale of landscape to interior space, but also to historians, critics and social scientists involved in the critical interpretation of these landscapes and the analysis of perception and experience. The conference is also open to artists, photographers, filmmakers, and others whose work addresses the representation of landscape and explores visual perception as a project driver.

⁴ CORBOZ, André, *Sortons enfin du labyrinthe*, Infolio, Genève 2009.

⁵ MORETTI, Luigi, « Struttura e sequenze di spazi », *Spazio*, n. 7, december 1952-april 1953, pp. 9-20 and 107-108.

The principal question that we are asking, that could be answered through the presentation of case studies, is the following: “How do the different forms of representation of an urban landscape, whether analytical (texts, images, diagrams) or artistic, translate the visual perception of systems in movement (space explored by moving through it, or space mutating under a fixed regard, both of which transmit an interior movement to the perceiving subject) and use it as a “primary resource” for the project?”. It is preferable that the contributions are situated along one of the three aforementioned interpretative categories.

Call for proposals

The proposals, maximum 10 000 characters (including spaces, notes apart), can be submitted in English, French, or Italian, accompanied by three black & white, captioned, images, and a short biography of the author, or authors (1000 characters including spaces). They should be submitted by February 1 to the following email address: leav@versailles.archi.fr. The successful proposals will be published before the conference. The editorial guidelines will be attached to the message informing the successful applicants of the acceptance of their proposals.

Schedule

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| 30 November 2020 | Publication of call for proposals |
| 1 February 2021 | Proposal submission deadline |
| 15 February 2021 | Selection of proposals and communication to participants |
| 15 March 2021 | Submission deadline for finished texts (after reworking following the observations of the scientific committee) |
| 18-19 June 2021 | Conference at Ensa Versailles, France |

Site

Ensa Versailles, 5, avenue de Sceaux, 78000 Versailles, France

Scientific committee

- Enrica Bistagnino, architect, professor of drawing, member of the Architecture and Design Department (DAD), Polytechnic School, University of Genoa, Italy
- Pilar Chias, architect, professor of urban drawing, member of the School of Architecture, University of Alcalá, Spain
- Maria Linda Falcidieno, architect, professor of drawing, member of the Architecture and Design Department (DAD), Polytechnic School, University of Genoa, Italy
- Agostino De Rosa, architect, professor of drawing, member of the Department for Project Culture, IUAV University of Venice, Italy
- Francesca Fratta, architect, professor of drawing, member of the Department of Architecture and Territories, Mediterranean University of Reggio Calabria, Italy
- Manuel Gausa Navarro, architect, professor of urban planning, member of the Architecture and Design Department (DAD), Polytechnic School, University of Genoa, Italy
- Andrea Giordano, architect, professor of drawing, member of the Department of Civil, Environmental and Architectural Engineering, University of Padua, Italy

- Alexis Markovics, art historian, teacher and research director at the Ecole Camondo, researcher at the LéaV (Ensa Versailles), France
- Gabriele Pierluisi, architect, lecturer accredited to direct research in Representational Arts and Techniques at Ensa Versailles, researcher at the LéaV (Ensa Versailles), France
- Livio Sacchi, architect, professor of drawing, member of the Architecture Department, D’Annunzio University of Chieti-Pescara, Italy
- Annalisa Viati Navone, architect, professor of *Architectural History and Culture* at ENSA Versailles, researcher at the LéaV (Ensa Versailles), France, and at the Archivio del Moderno, Switzerland

Scientific supervisors

- Gabriele Pierluisi, architect, lecturer accredited to direct research in Representational Arts and Techniques at Ensa Versailles, researcher at the LéaV (Ensa Versailles), France
- Maria Linda Falcidieno, architect, professor of drawing, member of the Architecture and Design Department (DAD), Polytechnic School, University of Genoa, Italy

Technical committee (scientific committee back-up)

- Alessandro Castellano, doctor DAMS & design, Polytechnic School Library, University of Genoa
- Cinzia Mazzone, architect, PhD candidate at the LéaV-Paris Saclay University

Organisation committee

- Luciano Aletta, architect, PhD candidate at the LéaV-Cergy Pontoise University
- Ruth Oldham, architect and researcher
- Armando Presta, engineer

Scientific secretary (for all enquiries)

Murielle Gigandet, assistant research engineer, LéaV (Ensa Versailles) | murielle.gigandet@versailles.archi.fr

The conference is organised by the **LéaV (Ensa Versailles)** in collaboration with the **Architecture and Design Department (dAD)**, Polytechnic School, University of Genoa